

Dear SOMHELP members,

More and more, I talk to people or hear about people who have health problems not because of genetics or lifestyle, but because of stress. Take a look at the following tips and see if there is at least one you can use in your own life. Remember that sometimes it takes a commitment to your own health and what may initially be a real sacrifice to decrease the stress in your life. Look at these and say, what **can** I do (or what can I do better), not "I can't."

- **Go to bed on time.** Number one because sleep is key to stress reduction. Pick a time for bed and a time to rise, and keep it consistent.
- **Get at least 30 minutes of aerobic exercise most days of the week.** Next to sleep, this is one of the best ways to decrease stress (and improve the quality of sleep!).
- **Say "no" to projects or extracurricular activities** that don't fit into your schedule or that compromise your mental health (stress you out).
- **Learn to delegate tasks** (perfectionist, who me?).
- **Simplify and unclutter your life.** Buy less. Watch TV less. Ask yourself, what would I really like to be doing right now?
- **Allow extra time to do things or get places.** If you are constantly running late, add a half-hour to your arrival estimate.
- **Pace yourself.** As much as you can, spread out big projects or big changes. If you can't spread them out, when you start feeling overwhelmed, remind yourself, "One thing at a time."
- **Live within your budget.** I know it's painful, but take the time to sit down and see what you are actually spending money on. Is it necessary? Don't use credit cards or purchase on credit, and concentrate on paying off any items you may have on credit right now (small things first, big things last).
- **Carry items that you need to read** with you to places where you might need to wait in line. Have a magazine you haven't been able to get to? Bring it with you to the grocery store or the gym!
- **Practice deep breathing** when you notice you are feeling stressed. Learn yoga. Take the time to stretch. This is important for everyone, but especially for men, who are notorious for not keeping limber. Back trouble? Stretch out your hamstrings (the back of your upper legs).
- **Listen to your favorite music** while you drive instead of the radio. Extra points for choosing soothing music (and a decrease in "road rage").
- **Eat a varied, balanced diet.** Does thinking about what to eat stress you out? Concentrate on eating good things (try for 25 grams of fiber each day) instead of avoiding "bad" things.
- Every day, **find time to be alone.** How tough is this? Try combining exercise with alone time, and turn off the headphones for a few minutes so your brain can have some "down" time.
- **Laugh – a lot.** Read cartoons, read a funny book, go to a comedy show, go out with a friend who makes you laugh. At the very least, if you are feeling stressed, smile! The muscles you use to smile release "feel good" endorphins in your brain and actually help relax you. How simple is that?

Information contained in the SOMHELP e-mails is general in nature, and not intended to diagnose, treat, cure, or prevent any disease. As always, you should consult with your healthcare provider before making any changes.

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